Research capacities in arts education and their practical applications in the southern African sub-region

by Robert McLaren and Stephen Chifunyise

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Summary

This paper is based on the experience of the authors in arts education in Southern Africa.. It sets out to make a provisional assessment of the capacity that exists in the Southern African sub-region to do research in arts education, the extent to which such research is applied in the practice of arts education and the factors at play.

In order to do this, the paper begins by examining the context of arts education in the sub-region, both formal and informal. Following on from this, it provides a general overview of the practice of arts education and the current state of arts education research, attempting to describe its regional specifics. It notes the areas in which research needs to be undertaken and attempts to answer the question as to what extent is the required research being undertaken and to what extent are its findings being applied.

Its conclusion is that the sub-region has a rich but underdeveloped capacity and research would assist in developing this capacity.
Historical context

Arts education in the sub-region is shaped and informed by the following historico-cultural phenomena: the culture of indigenous historical social formations, impacted on by migration, conquest and adaptation as well as resistance during colonialism; colonial arts and culture, including the notion of ‘colonialism of a special type’ as exemplified primarily by South Africa; post or neo-colonial national assimilation through continuing minority domination of resources and educational institutions and their affinity to the hegemonic ‘international’ or ‘globalised’ culture: the globalised arts and culture themselves; and regional integration.

Though the culture of indigenous historical social formations was not static and evolved during a period characterised by migration, invasion and conquest, it remains the bedrock of the cultural mores and practices of the majority people of the region. Therefore in any consideration of the arts and by corollary arts education, it must be seen as the basic resource, the first port of call and the primary point of reference.¹

With the advent of colonial subjugation, the historical cultures reacted, transformed and adapted. The imposition of Christianity and European languages and education were powerful tools of suppression, subversion, division and alienation. The result was the emergence of widening gaps in the arts and arts education that was still practised within the parameters of the traditional culture and that which was the product of European religion, culture and educational systems. Naturally this is a simplification as the conflicting ideologies, pedagogies and aesthetics both opposed and influenced each other, often in the same institution or individual.

The case of countries in which there were relatively substantial settler minorities, which became independent from the metropolis and remained after colonialism, has been described as ‘colonialism of a special type’. This could lead, as in the case of South Africa and to some extent Namibia, to the arts and arts education in these countries continuing to be dominated by descendants of the colonial minority, whose historical culture is not that of the majority and who retain and foster very strong links with European and North American white culture.

In the context of the arts and arts education, globalisation cannot be taken as a term that refers to the sharing by the peoples of the globe in each others cultures, access to resources, artistic practices and education. Globalisation as a term only achieved currency with the coming into being of a unipolar world in which the powerful and rich countries became able, through their wealth and domination of technology, to impose their arts and culture on the rest of the world without any
serious opposition - hence the concomitant call for cultural diversity as an expression of the anxiety that the cultural heritage, identity, minds and personalities of other peoples of the world were in danger of being alienated.

Partly as a response to the danger of domination, southern African nations, many of which are still governed today by parties deriving from the very liberation movements that fought colonialism for national emancipation, have over the years moved closer and closer towards regional integration – to the extent that in the 1990s the regional grouping, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), began to play a major role in the regional integration and regulation of a number of social and cultural practices, including those relating to gender, HIV/AIDS and the arts but subsequently lost momentum, especially in the area of promoting the free movement of artists across borders and exchanging experiences in arts education at festivals and their accompanying workshops.

The nature of arts education and the factors affecting its practice and development are shaped by the history of the sub-region, as briefly outlined above. Basically it accounts for the fact that the pattern of research and arts education in the sub-region may appear different, perhaps even unorthodox, to arts educators and researchers from other regions. An example of this is the relative importance of the role of informal structures in both research and arts education as opposed to that of the formal.

In the sub-region, as in many parts of the former ‘Third World’, the formal economy, as established by the colonial administrators, has been eroded and sometimes engulfed by informal economic activity. In this situation therefore it is perhaps natural to expect that the same would be true of other social sectors such as the arts and arts education. The informal sector is to a large extent the product of the people’s own initiatives. A powerful example was the dramatic development of popular or ‘community’ theatre in the early years after independence. This theatre derived directly from the disenfranchised and disempowered urban and rural grassroots and embodied the initiatives of ordinary people and the experiences of their communities. In the same way, the theory and practice of informal arts education is generally – or rather – is often far closer to indigenous practice or traditional culture than the formal.

With regard to the development of formal arts education, it is necessary to recognise the characteristic features of formal education itself in the sub-region, which in many ways approximate, in Freirean parlance, the ‘banking’ system of education, in which the teacher teaches, the pupils consume and examinations are the criterion of success or failure. Arts

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1 See Herbst (2003), Mans (1998)
Education, especially in the informal sector, has demonstrated a capacity to unlock this system and explore and introduce new democratic and participatory models of education – in other words, to propose alternative pedagogies.

To a large extent, the countries of the sub-region have had an extraordinarily similar historical experience. This factor needs to be taken cognisance of when assessing developments in the sub-region.

Generally, in these countries, in terms of the policy and practice of arts education, colonial policy encouraged education in the arts for the children of the settlers and in crafts for those of the indigenous inhabitants. Naturally the content of arts education for the children of the colonial minority was Eurocentric and narrow, sometimes not going any further than conservative and old-fashioned examples of the arts and literature of the colonial power.

With political independence, independent governments tended not to disrupt this pattern. Though they opened up the educational institutions of the colonial minority to the children of the majority, they made no fundamental changes to the content and practice of their arts education programmes.

There were two other developments. The influx of black children and the introduction of black teachers and school heads into these institutions led to the white minority withdrawing from what had once been their exclusive preserves and establishing their own private schools where they felt they could control the extent of black enrolment. There they continued to attach importance to the arts as they had done before. There thus came into existence a gap between arts education in state schools and that in private schools – a prominent characteristic of current arts education in countries like South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

The other development was the tendency of the new independent governments to permit existing arts education infrastructure inherited from the colonial government in institutions previously reserved for the colonial minority to decay or even to shed them owing to their emphasis on development models which give arts and culture a low priority generally and in education in particular.

**Arts education today**

*The formal sector* - as a result of the historical legacy of the sub-region, the practice and generally content of arts education north of the Limpopo differs markedly in many respects from that of South Africa and to some extent, Namibia, where the white minority continues to play a dominant role.
North of the Limpopo, formal arts education was for many years largely restricted to universities and private schools. However, starting with Tanzania, and subsequently in other countries, notably Zimbabwe, some governments began to acknowledge the importance of arts education by introducing it into the formal school curriculum.

The growing recognition of the importance of arts education in the sub-region coincided with and was possibly influenced by a series of workshops and meetings involving ASSITEJ, UNESCO, the Southern African Theatre Initiative (SATI), the Zimbabwe Academy of Arts Education, universities, arts colleges and various informal arts education organisations from Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The series began with the Regional Conference on Arts Education in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in 2001, and was followed by the ‘Approaches to arts education in Southern Africa’ conference in Harare/Lake Chivero, Zimbabwe, in 2002 and the ‘Finding Feet’ workshop in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2003.

However, where governments have moved to implement their decisions to introduce the arts into the school curriculum, they have lacked the resources to do so, in particular the capacity to train sufficient teachers and to provide materials and equipment for the arts programme - thus, as in the case of South Africa for instance, creating a situation in which there is a danger that in the process of streamlining the school curriculum the gains relating to arts education could be reversed. In the case of Zimbabwe, for reasons related to its special circumstances over the last ten years, the decision to introduce arts education in schools has just not been effectively implemented.

Governments may lack the capacity to implement their arts curricula in schools yet in the informal arts education sector a considerable capacity exists, with respect to training teachers, teaching itself and even materials and equipment. If government and the informal sector were able to co-operate, the planned implementation of the arts in the curriculum would stand a chance of succeeding. However two major factors militate against that development.

As a general rule, governments in the sub-region - South Africa is a partial but only a partial exception - tend to regard non-governmental formal or informal arts education initiatives either with suspicion or as competition and thus do not support or even seek to co-operate with them. Then even if they finally come to the realisation that the involvement of the informal sector is a key to success, they lack the funding to effect it.

At universities and colleges arts education takes various forms. In many universities in the sub-region there are departments of Theatre Arts or Drama, Art, Music and Film or Media. In some the
arts departments have been consolidated into Schools of the Arts.² In addition, in the Education Faculties there are Curriculum and Arts departments in which student teachers or often already practising teachers and lecturers at colleges of education are trained in arts practice, theory and teaching methods. Universities could have played a key role in research and experimentation and in this way impacting significantly on arts education curriculum reform in the basic formal education system.

Then there are the colleges of education or teacher training colleges themselves where teachers are trained to teach the arts curriculum. A hangover from the colonial era is the tendency of teacher training colleges to train teachers in music and ethnomusicology studies only - to the exclusion of theatre, dance and the visual arts.³

Outside of the universities there are ‘dedicated’ colleges and institutions offering degree, diploma or certificate training programmes, most frequently in music but less numerous in dance, fine arts, theatre arts and film and television. Bagamoyo College in Tanzania occupies a pre-eminent position and for long has been ‘a beacon of hope’.

*It was only natural that in the Action Plan formulated at the Finding Feet Conference in Windhoek in 2003, it was agreed that Bagamoyo should be ‘developed as the Arts Education regulating authority in the region’. The presence of two such formidable arts education powerhouses as the Performing Arts Department at the University of Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo in the same country led to a level of excellence, particularly in performance, which has made Tanzania a famous and respected centre of the arts...*(Kavanagh, 2006, p.140)

Noteworthy examples in Zimbabwe are the Zimbabwe College of Music⁴, the Zimbabwe Academy of Arts Education⁵ (both offering university-accredited degrees or diplomas), the Dance Trust of Zimbabwe and the National Gallery’s BAT Arts Workshop. In Namibia there is the College of the Arts⁶ and in South Africa the National School of the Arts and the Market Theatre Laboratory.⁷

All these institutions go some way to filling in the arts education gaps. However, they face a number of formidable constraints. First of all, their scope is extremely limited and the graduates they produce restricted in number. Secondly, they lack adequate funding and as a result they are

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³ The whole question of the study and training in indigenous music in so-called programmes ‘ethnomusicology’ is in itself indicative of the problems confronting arts education in the sub-region.
⁴ Kavanagh, 2006, pp.183-5
⁵ Kavanagh, 2006, pp.135-9
⁶ Kavanagh, 2006, p.178-9
⁷ Kavanagh, 2006, p.181-2
almost all understaffed and underequipped. In 2006, the Arts Department at Chancellor College in Malawi had only a single computer, no money for photocopying or stapling and lecturers had to provide their own paper.\(^8\)

Thirdly, in some cases they work with students who have not chosen to do a performing arts degree and who have not done any performing arts at secondary school. Fourthly, they are training graduates for a job market which is even more underfunded and characterised by unemployment. Thus teachers are trained to teach the arts curriculum but when they are posted to their schools, they end up teaching other subjects as there is no budget for the materials required or teachers are in short supply and school administrations consider the other subjects more important.

Fifthly, they labour against the entrenched attitudes of government, parents and the community at large concerning the arts as not being serious subjects and training for careers in the arts as not being fit to fund or spend money on or for their children to go into. Generally too school administrations will choose to exclude arts subjects. Schools often complain that they have difficulty in examining the practical components of arts subjects The school curriculum is seen to be already overloaded with examinable subjects and the burden on teachers excessive. Yet paradoxically, the arts are introduced at the secondary level where they can be examined and as a result at the primary level they are neglected.

**The informal sector**

When one comes to the informal sector, there are a number of ways in which it stands in marked contrast to the situation prevailing in the formal sector. Whereas those working in the formal sector have to contend with a general lack of interest and support or even opprobrium, the informal sector is made up of those that in general love the arts, want to be there and are dedicated and committed to making a go of it despite the obstacles.

This is not to say that the informal arts education sector does not face crippling constraints. It does. First and foremost is naturally funding. Just as the arts as a sector in the sub-region generally suffers from the shortage, unpredictability and fickleness of funding, for reasons outlined below the problem of funding for arts education is even worse than it is for the arts themselves.

Arts education outside the formal sector, universities, colleges and schools, is conducted in many different ways - starting with the individual artist who trains those he or she works or creates with to fully-fledged arts education organizations working with children of all ages, the youth and adults in local and national programmes.\(^9\) Despite its funding exigencies, the informal arts education sector

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\(^8\) Kavanagh, 2006, p170.

\(^9\) For descriptions and testimonies of some of this work, see Kavanagh, 2006, p.12-2 (Umzabalazo, Bulawayo,
is vibrant and deeply-rooted in the society, providing arts education in the form of inter-generational transmission, on-the-job experiential training, extra-curricular work with children and youth, workshops by arts associations and organizations.

Its informal structures and operations and its greater integration in the community make the informal sector of particular relevance in the sub-region in the light of the growing realisation of the importance of indigenous knowledge, arts and culture and hence intergenerational transmission.

Arts education programmes outside state institutions or private schools are rarely funded by the state, national, provincial or municipal structures and outside South Africa national corporate sectors are either weak or unwilling to make funding available for anything that is not a charity institution. Where the corporate sector does take an interest in funding, it expects excellence and professionalism but they have little interest in funding the process that produces excellence and professionalism, including arts education.

Those entering arts education programmes tend to come from the poorer sections of the society and they do not have the resources to pay meaningfully for their training. Thus such programmes have to rely on external funding partners, foreign embassies or funding organisations and United Nations Agencies and therefore they are especially vulnerable to the unstable dictates of external funding policy, which often determine the content and purpose of the programmes they fund.

However, arts education as a category is generally excluded from funding ear-marked either for education or for the arts. For instance, most funding organizations that support the arts, do not make provision for support for arts education. Likewise, those who support education do not support arts education. Arts education falls between two funding stools. This tendency to exclude arts education from funding is reflected as well in national culture funds and arts councils, which do not include arts education as a category.

An exacerbating factor is the fissiparous nature of informal arts education organisations. There is a tendency to be small, conducting programmes similar to those conducted by others and yet they largely work in isolation. Clearly for many different reasons it would be in the interest of the sector to come together. Recently there were moves in Zimbabwe to do this and establish a National Institute of Arts Education but these stalled owing to lack of funding.

One last factor relating to the practice and development of arts education in the region is the question of regional integration. The historical derivation of its nation states is not indigenous. As

Zimbabwe), pp.128-134 (Kids’ Care, Gauteng, South Africa). Other examples are Amakhosi, also in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and Sibikwa Theatre, in Gauteng, South Africa.
Basil Davidson and others have pointed out, state entities are historically quite arbitrary. They represent a drastic truncation in the organic social development that existed before colonialism in favour of polities defined by the colonial powers according to their various treaties and interests. Each state is the creation of Europe and each one was the colony of a European power. Links and communication, including the cultural and artistic, are in the first place between the individual country and its metropolitan parent and in the second place Europe and the United States. This communication structure is reinforced and even intensified by economic inequalities.

It is thus far more likely that an arts education institution in the sub-region will network, have exchanges co-operate with another arts education organisation in the north than an organisation down the road, let alone in another country in the sub-region.

With the formation of SADC efforts to move towards greater regional integration accelerated. SADC has a culture desk. As yet SADC has done very little if nothing to remedy the communication and co-operation problems in arts education outside of the SADC arts festivals in which take place in different member countries.

Thus regional networking, exchanges, co-operation and integration remain a challenge to arts education practitioners in southern Africa.

Research in arts education
Before addressing the question of research in arts education, four points need to be made.

Firstly, if the practice of arts education as such faces serious problems with regard to both resources and attitude, it follows that the problems facing research in arts education in the sub-region are even more serious. Though recently there has been something of an awakening as to the right of children to arts education, this awakening is not matched by a comparative appreciation of its corollary, the need for research to ensure that the pedagogy is indigenous, diversified, appropriate and relevant. Though, bearing in mind the historico-cultural factors which shape current arts education practice, the need for such research is urgent, there is as yet little consciousness of that fact.

Secondly, another characteristic is the hegemony in countries in the sub-region of oral as opposed to written communication and collective intellectual activity as opposed to individual. This affects the nature of study, research and publication. A flexible approach to definitions and practices of research needs to be adopted. Whereas written or published research is the norm in many countries, in southern Africa even at universities there is a comparative reluctance to write and publish. Hence written or published research in arts education in the sub-region is dominated by
scholars from Europe and the United States and those of the white minorities in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. As one arts educator and researcher at a university in the sub-region put it: “Our people prefer to consume rather than produce.”

Interestingly, where indigenous academics do embark on theses relating to arts education, they usually do so at foreign universities and sometimes actually orient their research to the practice of African arts and arts education in foreign countries – as in the case of Sheasby Matiure’s Indiana University dissertation on Zimbabwean music in North America. The main reason then for not researching in the region itself may be that there are no meaningful incentives.

Research at university level is also affected by other negative factors. In most cases, those likely to conduct research are trained in western universities and they may bring with them to their research in southern Africa a number of inappropriate and unhelpful attitudes. For instance, there is a tendency on the part of western-educated arts educators, particularly in theatre arts, not to give due attention to indigenous forms, embedded in the traditional performing arts, such as *gule wamkulu* in Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique, the *makishi* masquerades in Zambia and Shona funeral wake dramas in Zimbabwe. They often also do not take account of material carried in relatively non-academic ‘publication’, such as the print and electronic media yet, as it is precisely in these media that knowledge and information can be transmitted orally, they are an invaluable source for research.

Thirdly, the bedrock of arts education in the sub-region is traditional indigenous practice. Research in the processes of traditional indigenous knowledge, theory, practice and education is thus the core requirement for both an understanding of the arts and arts education in the sub-region and the practical application of that research. The following description of the practice of performing arts in the traditional context in Tanzania illustrates the way in which this practice can and must influence arts education in contemporary arts education:

> Theatre (in traditional society) was essentially utilitarian and thought to raise, discuss and impact societal norms, as well as be able to pass them to successor generations. This was not ‘arts for art’s sake but art for specific, or as we would now say, special purposes...most (performances) were participatory, and often the audience merged with the performers, and anyone with a spark of inspiration could pick up the song wherever. There were therefore no specific teachers as such but what was taught was more or less collective community wisdom, the repositories of which generally being the aged...Learning was informal and designed to equip the young to carry on the mantle of the community. Thus the teaching and learning context was based on community aspirations. (Mlama, 1991)
Initially research both written and published was foreign but recently there has been increasing involvement of indigenous researchers in various departments in Faculties of Education at universities in the region. As a result, publications by nationals are beginning to appear, making research findings more accessible and generally more appropriate and therefore capable of practical application. An example of this in Zimbabwe is P. Pashaya’s publications on children’s art and talking about art.

However, generally, if arts educators in the formal system do have some access to written and published sources, many do not have access to traditional arts and arts education knowledge systems either as theory or as practice. This is locked in the community itself and further research is required to unlock it and make it accessible to formal arts educators. This research needs to make inventories of oral traditions, traditional expressions, rites and rituals, traditional craftsmanship and custodians of these and introduce the results of this research effectively into informal and formal arts education.10

Two conventions govern and encourage this research – the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, where indigenous arts education is regarded as a form of intangible heritage and intergenerational transmission, both in the formal and the informal sectors, is regarded as a safeguarding measure, and the Convention on the ‘Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expression of 2006. In response to these conventions, work is beginning to be done in a number of countries in the sub-region on traditional arts practice, intergenerational transmission and the uses of the arts in traditional education. With the assistance of UNESCO, Malawi, Namibia, Botswana and Zambia have initiated projects in community-based inventorying of intangible cultural heritage, including its custodians (‘human treasures’).

In the process, there has been the prominent promotion of the ‘masterpieces’ of oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity in the sub-region such as the gule wamkulu ritual and makishi masquerades (referred to above), the mbende or jerusarema dance in Zimbabwe, the vimbaza dance of Malawi and the Chopi dance and music in Mozambique. This has greatly enhanced the recognition of the importance of safeguarding the traditional performing arts,

10 Note a series of training workshops is currently being run by UNESCO on Intangible Cultural Heritage with Stephen Chifunyise as one of the esource persons. These have been held in Namibia, Botswana, and Malawi and one in Zambia is soon to follow.
ensuring that they play their proper role in arts education and contributing to the availability of data on traditional arts practice, education and practitioners.

Fourthly, southern Africa is a difficult region in which to gather information, with again the partial exception of South Africa. Libraries are poorly stocked and financial constraints have severely limited their capacity to acquire recent publications and journals. Internet access is not good neither are communications. It is not a region characterised by strong and functioning email networks and neither is there sufficient funding for regular regional meetings, conferences or exchanges among professionals in the arts, still less those in arts education.

Research in the formal arts education sector – such research is still not a high-priority and extremely limited. What research does exist is more likely to be research on the arts themselves than on arts education. The Centre for Indigenous Instrumental Music and Dance Practices (CIIMDA) in Pretoria, South Africa, for instance, promotes the knowledge and practice of indigenous music and dance in the sub-region but not that of arts education per se – though of course the former knowledge impacts on the latter.

Research tends not to be well-funded nor generally accessible to arts educators or artists in the country nor to others in the region or internationally. Arts educators quote instances where arts education research they had conducted and published was not available in the library of the institutions at which they themselves taught.

By corollary, published international research on arts education is not readily accessible even at universities in the sub-region. As noted above, libraries are often poor and their stocks out of date. They do not have the budget to subscribe to professional journals, access online publications or buy hard copies of relevant materials – Amazon, for instance, advertises one important international collection of research articles on arts education at £399. Internet connectivity, where available, is rarely good enough to study work online or download – in the relatively scarce instances where such downloads are free.

Even if publications were generally accessible, they tend to feature only sporadic articles on arts education in the sub-region, either by visiting academics or those of the white minorities in South Africa and Namibia.

This is not reflective of the reality on the ground. However it represents the local challenge - either to make work known and available by contributing to international journals or to develop local ones.

In terms of the practical application of academic research in the formal arts education sector, the
main channel of transmission is teaching by the researchers at their academic institutions. Students are primarily lecturers at colleges of education or teachers of the subject in schools.

Factors impeding the practical application of research in schools seem to revolve around lack of resources and the status of arts education in the syllabus and in the community. Often trained teachers exist in the school but they do not teach arts education subjects. As Hatar notes with relation to Tanzania, ‘the central dilemma of the development of arts education in Tanzania – and probably in many other developing countries – is the lack of respect which continues to sideline the arts so that the policy-makers have yet to put in the resources commensurate with their importance’ (Kavanagh, 2006)

This situation is ameliorated in private schools where more resources exist and the administration attaches greater importance to arts education. A side effect however is the growing gap in arts education between government and private schools, as Eric Home’s research in South Africa reveals 11 Where arts education subjects are taught in private schools a continuing constraint is the hegemony of foreign and even colonial paradigms.

Recently the drama teacher at a private school in Harare phoned the Zimbabwe Academy of Arts Education, which has an extensive collection of books and materials on performing and media arts, for copies of a play she was thinking of doing with her drama club. The script she had in mind was *The Wind in the Willows.*

Where research does exist, shortage of resources and competition for funding often militate against co-operative research or shared findings. An example is the Southern African Industrial Research Development Council (SIRDC), based in Zimbabwe, which embarked on a commendable project to explore how to produce better and more competitive marimbas. Though they made use of the knowledge, experience and human resources of local marimba manufacturers, the findings of their research were not publicised but instead directed to competitive commercial production.

Governments may face problems in applying research owing to lack of resources, commitment or even requisite training or calibre. However a serious impediment relates to attitude – attitude to the arts and attitude to co-operating with the informal sector. An example taken from the experience of the authors is a UNESCO-supported research project developed by the Zimbabwe Academy of Arts Education and designed to produce a national model for training teachers in basic arts education in schools. Despite being acclaimed by participants and ministry officials, who attended the sessions and the final presentation, it was never implemented.

*Research in the informal arts education sector* – this is where the call for flexibility in terms of the

11 Home, E, *Art Education in South Africa in the Midst of Transition: Township and Private Schools* (internet)
definition of research and the hegemony of oral communication in the sub-region is particularly relevant. The tradition of individual academic, written or published research is a young and relatively weak one in comparison with oral and communal forms. For instance, as noted above, it is common practice in the sub-region at almost all levels for those involved in academic activity, study or decision-making, to do this collectively or communally. Thus when it comes to research, there is an emphasis rather on experiential research by practitioners and communal sharing of experiences, approaches and theories by practitioners at conferences and workshops.

The master artist – or for that matter most community performing arts groups or organizations - not only develops the theory of his art through practice but does the same with arts education. A master artist is invariably not only a master performer but also a master teacher. The master artist ensures that he or she hands on her knowledge and skills to the next generation. He or she discovers the most effective way of teaching through a combination of cultural practice and an experiential and practical process. These processes are in effect therefore a form of oral and practical research. This research needs to be documented and made accessible to others, to formal arts education practitioners in particular. The custodians of such practical research also need to be persuaded of the need or assisted to record their methods.

Another form of oral and communal research expresses itself in workshops and meetings where practitioners and representatives of arts associations and organizations meet to share and often have their findings recorded in the form of reports or publications. An example of this was a series of workshops and meetings involving ASSITEJ UNESCO, the Southern African Theatre Initiative (SATI), the Zimbabwe Academy of Arts Education, universities, arts colleges and various informal arts education organisations (Kavanagh, 2006) p.1-14). The “Approaches to Arts Education in Southern Africa” workshop in Zimbabwe was specially designed to be testimonial, in other words, to give those working in arts education an opportunity to share their work and experience with others orally and communally.  

In this way practical, experiential research is expressed in keeping with the oral and communal traditions of the southern African community and then given expression in written and published form. For instance, publications which emerged from this series of meetings include not only the reports of the meetings but also the UNESCO booklet, “Cultural Heritage, Creativity and Education

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13 “The seminar was intended ‘to be an opportunity for those involved in Arts Education to get together, meet, tell each other about their work, share experiences, discuss problems, tell stories and dream about the future.’ – Kavanagh (2006) p.7
for All in Africa” (UNESCO, 2001) and the book Ngoma: approaches to arts education in Southern Africa (Kavanagh, 2006).

Whereas conventional research faces serious problems in its practical application, as described above, particularly as relating to accessibility, ongoing practical experiential research has the capacity to integrate research with application. Methodology, pedagogy and practical application are part of an integrated process (praxis). This does not mean that there are no factors inhibiting practical application. There are. For instance, for research findings to be successfully implemented arts educators have to have the capacity to understand them and the motivation to implement them. If these findings involve fundamental or even substantial transformation or conflict with established usage, the arts educator will need considerable training and the application a high level of monitoring and supervision. An informal arts education organisation may lack the resources and the time to do this.

Despite the constraints, there is much that is innovative and original in terms of arts education theory and practice in the informal sector. There is thus a compelling need to strengthen arts education research capacity in the sub-region. This can be done in the following ways: advocacy and education on the value and importance of the arts and the need for arts education research; developing greater accessibility of research findings; creating relevant integrated regional networks; stressing the vital importance of indigenous knowledge, arts and culture and hence traditional arts education models such as intergenerational transmission, initiation, games, stories and their application in formal arts education and making it available to teachers; identifying custodians of these and introducing them effectively into informal and formal arts education; encouraging informal arts educators not only to teach but also to research and publish on how they teach; integrating practical research in the informal sector into formal arts education; and developing and improving government partnerships with non-governmental arts educators.

A case study - the Zimbabwe Academy of Arts Education, which published Ngoma and hosted the “Approaches to Arts Education in Southern Africa” workshop in Zimbabwe, was set up with funding from DANIDA by the Zimbabwean arts education organisation, CHIPAWO (www.chipawo.org).

CHIPAWO was founded in 1989 in Harare, Zimbabwe, by Stephen Chifunyise, Julie Frederikse, Farai Gezi and Robert McLaren. Originally CHIPAWO was partly an acronym for ‘Children’s Performing Arts Workshop’ - though this was subsequently dropped as the organization developed its current programme,. Essentially, ‘chipawo’ means ‘please share’ or ‘share also’ in the Shona.

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14 The last of these is possibly, if not the first, perhaps the most comprehensive survey of the state of arts education in the sub-region, featuring material on the aspects of arts education in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, with information on Zambia and Malawi as well.
language of Zimbabwe and sharing is one of its core values. CHIPAWO’s core business is what it calls ‘arts education for development and employment’.

During the course of its growth and development, CHIPAWO’s insistence on the importance of arts education and of children being well-grounded not only in the arts but in the arts and culture of the indigenous traditions, faced by the opposition not only from many in the society but, particularly in recent years, a hostile and steadily deteriorating political and economic environment. The story of its survival and growth is a story of children’s courage and determination to claim and enjoy their right to arts education in the face of the depredations of HIV/AIDS, drastic shortages of power, water, fuel, food, and even at one time shelter, spiralling inflation, draconian restrictions on cash withdrawals – or sometimes the simple unavailability of cash itself – not to mention conflict and violence both in the high-density suburbs and the countryside where most of the children resided.

However what is relevant to this discussion is that there are in the sub-region organisations which, while scarcely known and little documented regionally or internationally, have not only defied the obstacles but also developed innovatory practice in the area of arts education which would be of interest and possibly of use to many practitioners and researchers both inside and outside the sub-region. It is for this reason that CHIPAWO has registered an arts education organization in South Africa called CHIPAWO World.

The background to CHIPAWO’s foundation and subsequent work is of course Globalisation and the CHIPAWO arts education programme aims, among other things, to develop a child who can take on the culture of so-called ‘Internationalism’ proud of and confident in his or her own diverse history, language, arts and culture. In addition, the CHIPAWO experience consists of an integrated arts syllabus comprising music, dance, drama, video and television, and social and career education aimed at developing free-thinking, critical young people, who have a range of life and career skills and espouse progressive practice on issues such as gender, AIDS, disability, human rights and democracy. Through the practical experience of developing the programme with children, a comprehensive pedagogy, aesthetic and ethics has been developed.15

Children are able to pursue an arts education programme from early childhood up to the age of 25, culminating in a university-accredited diploma in performing or media arts and subsequent admission to a university. CHIPAWO has taken a special interest in the development of Early Childhood Arts Education (ECAE), runs a number of ECAE centres and held the first seminar in Zimbabwe on the subject in 2007.

15 15 Arts Fit for Children, internal CHIPAWO publication, compiled in response to the participation of a CHIPAWO child in the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children (INGASS) and the Children’s Forum in
CHIPAWO participates in national as well as child development in for instance campaigns and arts-based interventions on the law, health, education, climate change, human rights, tourism and even international relations.

Finally, it produces not only performances of all kinds by children and young people, many of which tour or feature in festivals internationally. Its media unit produces children’s television series and programmes and pioneered television in Zimbabwe in sign language for the deaf. It also manufactures traditional musical instruments.

This brief summary of the CHIPAWO experience is offered as but one example of what research in the sub-region would uncover were it to be funded and properly undertaken. There is groundbreaking work being done in the sub-region. The practice is there and the human resources to carry out the research are also there. What is needed is the means to carry out the research, to communicate within the sub-region and to document and make the findings accessible.

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